



New York - New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program

Estuary Vocabulary

Aquatic: living or growing in or on water

Bight: a wide bay formed by a bend or curve in the shoreline

Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD): a measure of pollution, a high BOD means there is a large amount of organic matter in the water, and a lot of dissolved oxygen is consumed in its decomposition

Biodiversity: the number of different varieties of life forms in a given area

Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO): event triggered by a heavy rain, in which a portion of a combined sewer's contents are sent directly into a receiving waterbody, instead of a treatment plant

Conservation: wise use and protection from depletion and pollution

Dissolved Oxygen (DO): oxygen that is present (dissolved) in water and therefore available for fish and other aquatic organisms

Dredging: the cleaning, deepening, or widening of a waterway using a machine (dredge) that removes materials with a scoop or suction device

Ecosystem: the interacting system of a biological community and its non-living environment; also the place where these interactions occur

Effluent: liquid waste discharged into the environment from a source such as an industry or sewage treatment plant; it can be treated or untreated

Erosion: the wearing away of the Earth's surface by running water, wind, ice, or other geological agents

Estuary: a partly enclosed body of water where salt water and fresh water meet and mix

Eutrophication: process whereby excess nutrients stimulate plant and algae growth, which in turn can lead to hypoxia

Floatables: solid waste materials and natural debris that float on or just beneath the water's surface

Food web: a representation of the flow of energy among producers, consumers, and decomposers in a community

Geographic Information Systems (GIS): a system of hardware, software, data, people, organizations and institutional arrangements for collecting, storing, analyzing and disseminating information about areas of the earth

Habitat: the place or type of site where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives and grows

Hypoxia: low concentrations of dissolved oxygen in water. This condition is harmful to many aquatic organisms.

Infiltration: process by which the earth is used to capture and filter stormwater

Natural Resources: raw materials supplied by the Earth and its processes (e.g. nutrients, minerals, water, plants, animals, etc.)

Nonpoint Source Pollution (NPS): pollution that comes from many diffuse sources. NPS pollution is caused by rainfall or snowmelt moving over and through the ground. As the runoff moves, it picks up natural and human-made pollutants.

Nutrients: essential chemicals (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) needed by plants for growth. Excessive amounts of nutrient in the water can contribute to massive growth, accumulation and eventual decay of aquatic plants, especially algae. This uses up oxygen, which can lead to hypoxia.

Pathogens: microscopic disease-causing organisms such as bacteria and viruses that are found in untreated human sewage and animal waste

Pollution: contaminants in the air, water, or soil that cause harm to human health or the environment

Runoff: water (originating as precipitation) that flows across surfaces rather than soaking in; eventually enters a body of water; may pick up and carry a variety of pollutants

Salinity: the amount of salt dissolved in water

Salt marsh: an estuarine habitat that is submerged at high tide, but protected from direct wave action and overgrown by salt-tolerant herbaceous vegetation; aquatic grasslands (coastal “prairies”) affected by changing tides, temperatures, and salinity

Shoreline: a line where a body of water and the shore meet

Tide: the alternate rising and falling of the surface of the ocean and of water bodies connected with the ocean, which occurs usually twice a day and is caused by the gravitational attraction of the sun and moon occurring unequally on different parts of the earth

Toxics: chemicals, such as PCBs, dioxin, pesticides and heavy metals, which can be harmful to living things and can accumulate in the food chain

Water (H_2O): a clear liquid, solid or gas made up of tiny molecules of 2 parts hydrogen and one part oxygen

Water cycle (hydrologic cycle): the cycle of the earth’s water supply from the atmosphere to the earth and back

Watershed: the land area that drains into a stream; the watershed for a major river may encompass a number of smaller watersheds that ultimately combine at a common point

Wetland: areas that periodically have waterlogged soils or are covered with a shallow layer of water, resulting in reduced soil conditions. Wetland areas typically support plant life adapted to wet environments.